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ABSTRACT

Low college admission and retention rates among blacks have contributed significantly to black underrepresentation in leadership and decision making roles in today's highly technological society. To a large extent, admission and retention problems stem from cultural differences, which cause blacks to perceive hostility in predominantly white college campuses. In a society where the values of the white majority dominate, blacks must conform in order to succeed; however, conformity may require sacrificing one's own values, and lead to feelings of frustration and self worthlessness. On the other hand, to maintain feelings of self worth, blacks may have to adopt behaviors that will hamper their success in the dominant society. In higher education, the fact that white culture emphasizes intellectualism and the scientific disciplines, while blacks are predisposed toward the humanities, works against blacks' success in science and other technical fields that the present society values. In order to increase black participation in these areas, colleges must focus on (1) selecting black students who can adjust to the college's social system, (2) developing goal oriented behaviors among blacks that stress scientific and intellectual pursuits, (3) emphasizing that minority and dominant value systems can coexist, (4) providing social and psychological support for blacks, and (5) allowing for differences in students' learning styles. (MJL)

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Cultural Differences That Affect Retention of Minorities on Predominately White Campuses

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ABSTRACT

Cultural Differences That Affect Retention of Minority Students On Predominantly White Campuses

By Herman A. Young

The objectives of this paper are to cite some of the assumed or neglected cultural differences that play important parts in enhancing retention of minority students on predominantly white campuses and the graduation rate of those same students.

Another important aspect of enhancing the retention and graduation of quality educated minorities is to increase their under-representation in the more technological fields like Engineering, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Computer Technology and Allied Health professions.

The remediation of this problem is multi-faceted. First the college environment produces isolation and the psychological effects therefrom.

Next the student must deal with his or her own identity in a positive manner such that he/she internalizes an internal locus of control.

Then role models that aid in their aspirations and goals help them believe that they are attainable for them as were attained by other such persons as themselves.

These factors tend to move one toward a black psychological mind-set. Such a frame of reference tends to provide a coping mechanism or strategem for minority student success in situations of isolationism on campuses with elitist attitudes and faculty which do not give minority encouragement and emotional support.

Thus black students need to be looked at from a different perspective if their potentials are to be maximized and they are to attain their rightful places of leadership and creativity that will contribute to world peace and future technology of the coming information age.

Low-achieving students have increasingly become a concern among parents and educators throughout the country. A recent CBS TV series, "Is Anybody Out There Learning?", is just one reflection of the national interest in the diminishing quality of education. This series took a close look at what is going on in the entire school system, observing that at the lower levels Johnny can't read, and at the upper levels one out of two college freshmen is dropping out of America's colleges and universities. The television essays also gave an equally accurate description of the range of explanations that are presented for the weakened state of learning today. At one extreme, social promotion is blamed; at the opposite pole, providing equal educational opportunities for minorities is held responsible.[1] Regardless of the reason for the condition of education today, minorities suffer particularly in the public school system, because of their low socio-economic status and cultural education. Inevitably, the lack of being able to read and write has limited blacks in intellectual and professional pursuits. Whatever the cause, this problem must be remediated.

One important aspect of the consequences of poorly educated minorities is the under-representation of blacks in leadership roles of todays highly technical society and international affairs of the third world nations. The shortage of blacks in the nation's scientific manpower pool is particularly alarming in view of the experimentation with genetic engineering, for this under-representation results in a lack of power to control the

decision-making process. The implications of this situation for both the physical and spiritual well-being of mankind in the future are so serious that it cannot be ignored.

Unfortunately, the remediation of this problem of a disproportionately small number of black intellectuals is difficult. Indeed, once the enlightened citizen has advanced from asking "Is anybody out there learning?" to pondering why more minority students are not in sciences and intellectual fields, he is confronted with the need to find a two-fold solution. Studies reveal that increasing the number of minority students in intellectual careers involves giving them both academic assistance and psychological support. For example, the rigorous academic criteria which minority students must face before they are admitted into highly intellectual fields screen out even those students with high potential and scientific aptitude. On the other hand, another and different sort of solution is called for because of the unique cultural experiences, motivation, learning style, psychological stress, locus of control, and oppressive environment of black students.

A study done by Dr. Donald H. Smith of Baruch College came up with the following findings on Comparison of the Perceptions of Major Barriers to Admission and Retention and Remedies of Black Students. Although his study looked at Admissions and Remedies, we wish to focus on the issues of barriers to retention at seven prestigious institutions. Dr. Smith results listed 6 major barriers:

1. Inadequate financial aid
2. Feelings of alienation and loneliness

3. Failure to use available counseling
4. Inadequate secondary school preparation
5. Cultural/racial identity adjustment
6. Sexual/Social relationships.

However, at all seven universities the underlying causes of black attrition appears to be rooted in the poor quality of black life on white college campuses, black student perceptions in hostile environments; a view shared by the vast majority of black faculty/administrators, queried and recognized by almost two-thirds of the white respondents. He further stated that black students must attempt to deal with loneliness and alienation as well as hostility from white professors and students, at the same time they are trying to adjust to a largely foreign academic millieu.[2] Considering the barriers to their success, then, it is not difficult to understand why blacks have to catch up as well as keep up with their white counterparts in order to mainstream in these careers. Be that as it may, increasing the supply of minority intellects will necessitate the implementation of alternative, or, auxillary delivery systems.

An active pursuit of the previously stated solutions must be preceded by an appreciation of the fact that a well established system of creating engineers, scientists and philosopher kings for the dominant society has been ineffective in their production. Although each person lives in the same general society, is exposed to the same socialization process, watches the same television programs and shops at the same stores, each has different attitudes about the world and thus different cultures. The dominant society still protects the status quo, and thus its

values are to perpetuate a good thing. The minority culture has traditionally been kept out and thus views the methods of dominant society as oppressive. While good will and intentions are glorious, the nature of the individual members of society has not changed, there are still the "ins" versus the "outs" and the "haves" versus the "have nots". This basic understanding provides a background for an examination of some of the obstacles to black achievements.

In considering the intellectual progress of blacks, society has conditioned the non-reflective observer to overlook the simple behaviorists' theory of stimulus-response: no reward, no shaping, or reward for achievement. Instead, society prefers to relate society-recognized achievements to inheritance, viewing inferior and superior genes as correlates of productivity, as per Jensen.[3] Yet, the most basic systems of reward have been unavailable to blacks. The Protestant work ethic, which is still one of the primary tenets of our society, has worked for blacks on a very limited level. Hard work brings success only at the economic survival stage. This is evidenced in the economic gap between the races in all classes.

Although society has limited its rewards, blacks have still internalized the values and norms of the dominant culture. The Protestant work ethic has built in the need for achievement, the need for self-assertion, and the need for approval, as well as one's worth as defined by one's achievement. Self-assertion and aggression are expected characteristics necessary to move a person toward achieving his goals. Success and hard work bring one approval and esteem from the wider community (external locus of

evaluation). Yet at each stage, blacks are frustrated. Not to achieve is to accept inferiority and self-worthlessness. It has often been stated that the expectation of failure becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. One cannot, therefore, ignore the possibility that the nature of the environment of the inner city and its psychological impacts relates to the fact that so few blacks pursue intellectual endeavors. Obviously, youth whose psychic energies are absorbed by the exigencies of daily survival have little energy to pursue intellectual curiosity and knowledge for its own sake.

Despite the fact that the social millieu has fostered low self-concepts among blacks which would lower black aspirations, blacks continue to struggle for success to satisfy their own patterned needs, needs which were also established by the socialization process. If blacks are to fulfill their need of self approval then they will probably adopt behaviors unacceptable to those of dominant society established by the socialization process. From this kind of evidence, Poussaint has concluded that "a realistic inability for meaningful self-assertion is a greater inhibitor of ability to achieve than is any other variable.[4]

Moreover, the different frames of reference between black and white cultures further compounds the problem. Even black students who do get to college find barriers to admission, retention and graduation. As the black culture operates from its innate affective domain it is still under the umbrella of the cognitive dominant society. It is difficult for blacks to devote parts of themselves to cognitive dominance without recognizing the affective motivations, aspirations, and the price one must be willing to pay to achieve a future goal. The decision to pursue

an intellectual career would entail considering how much of one's self, integrity, and identity must be sacrificed to achieve a viable vocation. The relationship between the emotions and success in certain career areas is a topic for continued study.

Teachers who are convinced of the importance of the affective domain in science work toward learning outcomes. The Educational Policies Commission of the National Education Association listed the outcomes in terms of the following values:

1. longing to know and to understand;
2. questionning of all things;
3. demand for verification;
4. respect for logic;
5. consideration of premises; and
6. consideration of consequences.[5]

Science educators who recognize the importance of the affective domain seem to rest their case on identifying learning outcomes. Most studies about blacks have shown that aspirations and motivations, as well as ability, are determiners of their success. Therefore, greater attention should be focused on the affective domain.

Another point of interest to interject as this juncture is that characteristics of cognitive domain and the affective domain may rest in the appropriate development of the hemispheres of the brain.

The left hemisphere, or cognitive domain, is attributed with qualities of verbal, sequential, temporal, digital, logical, analytical and rational; all associated with Euro-American thought. The right hemisphere, or affective domain, is attributed with qualities of nonverbal, visuo-spatial, simultaneous, spatial,

analogic, gestalt, synthetic and intuitive, also associated with Eastern thought.[6] In addition to this knowledge, variations in learning styles have been related to cultures as well.

Joseph Bogen has said that the dominant culture so honors the left hemisphere that the educational system is based on its development. He further states that by so doing it may be deficient and limit a broad spectrum of human capabilities.[7]

Further studies have shown that careers in science and analytical thought are associated with the left hemispheres, while careers requiring intuition, creativity, are associated with the right hemisphere.

It is well known that the majority of blacks pursue careers in the humanities, social sciences, and athletics. One obvious reason has been that the areas of education, social work, theology, arts, and sports have been more open to blacks and thus have provided a large number of role models for young blacks to emulate. These fields have also been chosen because the disciplines themselves allow resolution of personal conflicts and pursuit of issues relevant to the black predicament. Obviously, sports are one constructive and viable way for blacks to channel assertiveness. The disciplines in the humanities allow the individual to focus on the purpose of life, man's role in society, individual worth and expression. On the other hand, the sciences presume that the student has already resolved these issues and the emphasis is on the objective nature of truth. Studying scientific subjects results in a psychological press that often makes it difficult for a black to acquire the skills required in science while dealing with the subjective problems of his identity.

Add to these factors the lack of an intellectual tradition among blacks, and, hence, the lack of role models for black youth to emulate, as well as the inadequate curriculum of many inner city schools, and one has a comprehensive picture of the factors working against black participation in high intellectualism in humanities, science and technology. Against such a background, mere exposure to intellectual disciplines, counseling and financial aid are only a beginning.

From the black perspective, the overriding issue becomes, first of all, racial-affects. In counseling black students into depths of intellectualism, one must first put two divergent factors into perspective: 1) resolving conflicts of racial identity; and 2) developing personal qualities conducive to a career in science or intense scholarship. Because of society's still subtle rejection of the black identity, black students expend a great deal of psychic energy in introspection and self-assessment as they access the roles in which society will allow them to function. In the student parlance, this is referred to as "getting oneself together." For the average black student on a predominantly white college campus, this takes from two to three years. In the process of "getting oneself together," the student passes through an anti-society stage during which he sorts out the truths from the myths that have been perpetrated upon him--myths of black inferiority and the lack of black contributions to American's greatness, and about the distortions in the social order that tends to oppress him. In this stage, he discovers that he is a victim of society rather than a victim of his own shortcomings. Once he acquires a belief in himself and a firm self-acceptance,

he can then turn his psychic energies toward a career and educational goals.

Adjusting to the learning process and establishing career goals are typical college student problems. Assessing one's strengths in various disciplines, learning how to survive on a college campus, and selecting a vocation which offers viable employment are common to all students. Certain divisions, such as the social sciences, education, and the humanities allow the student time to explore, through two years of liberal studies, himself and his world before concentrating in his major. These fields are more congruent with the evolution of self-awareness which many black students undergo. However, in the fields of natural sciences there is little room for this order of development. Science by its very nature means rigor, perseverance, and absorption into subject matter with little time for social and personal development. The student who pursues intensive scholarship must follow the same pattern of intellectualism as that of the collegiate scientists. This means that he must be self-directed, goal-oriented, and dedicated to the subject matter prior to his freshman year. He must declare a major in one of the intellectual fields where the course work is sequential from the first through the fourth year. The black student in technology has to cope with his personal identity problems while competing with the average student in the highly disciplined curriculae while also pursuing his career goals.

The ever present question for blacks in science technology, then, is how to overcome psychological press of racial/affects and its effects. Since the majority of black students are enrolled

at predominantly white colleges and universities, it becomes increasingly clear that the success of recruitment and retention of minority students in highly disciplined careers does not depend entirely upon the recruiter and counselor, but also upon overcoming the revolving door policies and biases of the administrators and instructors.

There are twelve effective objectives that colleges and all their teachers and administrators should address themselves to in helping students develop into scientists and intellectuals.

1) First, it is important to select students who have the personality to absorb themselves in the subject matter without continuously having to reevaluate and adjust themselves to the racial-social system. This means selecting the students who, on entering college, already "have themselves together" or the students who can forego their personal development for their professional development. In both cases, such students are rare.

2) In the counseling of these students, goal-oriented behaviors should be emphasized such that being a good scientist or intellectual is a high priority. Implicit in this approach is the risk that self-concept is attached too closely to achievement. If a student cannot succeed in his subject area, he might feel himself to be a failure as a person.

3) It must be made clear to such students that dedication to science or their particular disciplines must supercede all other social concerns. For these students, egos may be strengthened by fostering achievement-attitudes about productive scholars and their roles in society. Students of the social and natural sciences should be encouraged to be slightly egotistical and

proud of their individualistic value systems about sciences, which is not to be confused with superficial "ego tripping".

4) Furthermore, these students' need to recognize the congruency of their dual value systems of their minority culture and dominant society without value judgments having to be put upon them. Yet with the recognition that social economic status class-value differences do exist. These factors are some of the ingredients at work on the black college campuses, which produce 75 percent of the black scientists and intellectuals. This has been attested to by both Bond and Young.[8]

5) Many students will need a great deal of personal support. These students also need to be given "special" attention. Other students need to see professors express special interest in them.

6) Students need to develop a strategy for achieving long-range objectives. They need to understand the concept that "winning wars is the result of winning a series of little battles"; and that little battles are frequently won by the inevitable result of perseverence as well as by tactics.

7) Students need to be taught how to deal with failures as well as success. They need to know when to concede to insurmountable difficulties and move on to other arenas of conquest, realizing that some failures are to be expected and are outside their own purview. Students must learn that there are simply some aspects of life, which can produce failure, which are beyond a person's control.

8) Students should be taught patience which will reduce anxiety and frustration by realistically assessing the gap between their achievements and their expectations of themselves with

respect to a timeframe for realistically bridging the gap between their initial abilities and those required for the desired achievements.

9) These students have to be taught when to take the burden of failure from their own egos and place it on the proper, identifiable causes, such as faculty biases, inadequate skills, and/or personal problems.

10) These students need a strong sense of belief in themselves and their potentials. That both mind and body do respond to positive subconscious suggestions should be stressed.

11) If an educational institution sincerely desires to foster/support black students in the sciences and other scholarly disciplines, it is essential that its professors hlep instill in students the thirst for knowledge for its own sake, rather than learning just to make a passing grade.

12) Finally, learning style differences need also be considered. It is ironic that science, which prides itself on the inductive method, on first observing and collecting empirical data and then drawing conclusions or theories, is most taught by the deductive method. Although engineering schools have greatly utilized experiential learning through cooperative educational programs and apprenticeship programs, the opportunity to apply and practice theories usually comes later in most student's college careers. Experiential learning is taught through practicums and internships in most other disciplines.

Such an approach may obviate the hamrful effect of teachers' middle class biases and expectations that cause them to label students as "slow" or "disinterested in science." Frank Reisman

has pointed out that a pupil may be slow because he is extremely careful, meticulous, or cautious. He may be slow because he refuses to generalize easily, or because he cannot understand a concept unless he does something physically, for example, with his hands.[9] This points to teaching and learning modes which are appropriate for the attributes of the various subcultural groups and which can heighten motivation and maximize potential.

Conclusion

Recruiters, counselors, and professors usually play a unique role in attracting minority students to predominantly white colleges and universities and can also be surrogate role models. In their recruitment, they should make a special effort to discover those black students wigh high intellectual potential. They cannot assume that black students have had the same exposure to science careers as their white counterparts. The fact that the majority of blacks are spread among fields of education, sociology, and the humanities may be evidence of the career limitations within the black mindset. While being careful not to impose their values upon their students, professors can take deliberate care to see that bright minds are made aware of the success of brilliant scientists and scholars who work in the area of the students' career choices. This process would occur not only in terms of the material rewards and possible Nobel Prize Laureates, but in terms of having black input in an arena which is at the heart of the power base of American society. By giving these students extra support throughout their college career, and especially the first years, professors can speed up the process

of "putting it all together" so that students can overcome personal hangups in adjusting to the system and devote their energies to playing catch-up in very demanding careers. By a close follow-through on these students, professors can also make sure that they are aware of various graduate fellowships and means by which a terminal degree can be achieved. Professors have the means of encouraging and providing supportive services for students in almost every area. The pressing problem, however, is convincing these teachers to recognize the need for retention of black students in sciences and other areas of intense scholarship; and to set the objectives of increasing the number of black Ph.D.'s as one of their priorities.

Indeed it would appear that an increase in the productivity of black scientists, scholars and intellectuals may well serve as a long overdue means of change toward assimilating minorities into the dominant society.

Notes

1. CBS TV Series "Is Anybody Out There Learning?" National Network 1979.

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9. Reisman, Frank, A Guide to Diagnostic Teaching of Arithmetic, Merril Co., Columbus, Ohio, 1972.